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AUTHOR Ekman, Richard
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ABSTRACT

Using generalizations based on pre-U.S. Civil War era history to interpret U.S. social history, this paper presents: (1) the effects of various social institutions in history on civic values; (2) the current role of U.S. colleges and universities as social institutions; and (3) curriculum development suggestions for the preparation of civic education teachers. The historical generalizations are based on the role of religion, the development of U.S. towns and cities, educational practices, the Revolutionary War, social reforms, and the Civil War. No one event or institution has had a long monopoly in shaping the civic values of U.S. youth, but education is the most pervasive current force. Curriculum innovations in schools have recently stressed the use of interdisciplinary courses to teach civic values, but teachers often are not well-trained in this type of instruction which requires information from both the social studies and the humanities' disciplines. A curriculum that could be effective in preparing teachers to teach civic values should stress: (1) history; (2) social and political thought; (3) economics; (4) human motivation and organizational behavior; and (5) placing U.S. history in an international perspective. (JHP)

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS ON THE CIVIC VALUES OF AMERICAN YOUTH

Richard Ekman, Director
Division of Research Programs
National Endowment for the Humanities
Washington, D.C. USA

Irsee, West Germany

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My topic this morning is no smaller, unfortunately, than the entirety of American social history: almost 400 years of history for more than 200 million people, somehow to be covered in 30 minutes. The only task more difficult, I suppose, would be to attempt a social history of Germany, with its much longer history, and--until the twentieth century--at least as many people as the United States. I suppose I should be comforted by the view, expressed to me by a British colleague, that America is the only country in the world that has progressed from barbarism to decadence without passing civilization along the way.

I hope to do three things in my remarks. The first is to limit the sweeping assignment Charles Quigley gave me to an interpretation of American social history in relation to a few institutions, to omit all the data that supports my generalizations but to assure you that it exists, and to stop this historical review just after the American Civil War, in 1865, which is when the effects of various social institutions on civic values begin to resemble our experience in the late twentieth century.

Second, although it is always dangerous to use history in order to extract from it patterns, cycles, or predictions, I will nonetheless next jump from the mid-nineteenth century to the present time in order to focus on the past ten or fifteen years of history of American colleges and schools.

And third, I will try to suggest a curriculum for the training of teachers of civic education that is sensitive to the lessons of past American experience in attempting to teach civic values.

To begin, then, some generalizations are possible. In the decades after the first American settlements in the early 1600's, the most important social institution in America was the church. Seventeenth-century America was a patchwork of isolated coastal communities. Farming villages, dependent on Europe for almost everything, these settlements were populated by Europeans, who were mostly loyal to their fatherland--which was England for most of them--but fiercely committed to their own religious beliefs, which differed from the dominant creed at home. In separated churches with considerable local, congregational authority, the values of the local church became the values of the community. The rites of church institutional life--baptism, marriage, or conversion--were the dominant rituals for young people in their formative years.

No-one is quite sure when, but clearly by the end of the seventeenth century--that is, within only three or four generations of migration--the previously unquestioned authority of the churches began to decline. Perry Miller's work on the Halfway Convenant suggests that declension occured within one generation! Church attendance and membership slipped; private morality became lax to

judge from evidence on crime increases and illegitimate births. By this time, meanwhile, some large commercial port cities had arisen--Charleston, Boston, Philadelphia--and the rate of growth in these was phenomenal. This period marks the beginning of America as a land of genuine opportunity--a society composed of provincial towns, cut off from the cities, and cities, chaotic boomtowns dominated by entrepeneurial merchants with contacts in London and the Caribbean as vital as those with nearby villages. In 1730 it took two days to travel with a loaded wagon of goods to sell from Newburyport, Massachusetts to Boston--a mere fifty miles, suburban commuting distance these days.

Schooling was widely available to seventeenth and eighteenth century Americans. There is some evidence of very high literacy rates, even by modern standards. Schoolmasters were often young men, just graduated from the colonial colleges--Harvard, Yale, William and Mary, King's College (now Columbia), New Jersey (now Princeton)--intending ministerial careers, but taking a few years off to grow up before settling into a pulpit. In eighteenth century America, ministers stayed in their pulpits for very long periods. Twenty years was not uncommon. The effects on the civic values of students of teachers who were themselves the products of colleges that emphasized ministerial training is easy to imagine.

But in fact we know little about the effects of school teachers on their pupils' values except through the curriculum. There, as is well known, every subject was taught with its moral and religious dimensions prominent--the McGuffy reader, for example, using rhymed couplets with moral lessons for each of the letters of the alphabet. We do know that often school teachers (and sometimes ministers) boarded with the families of their charges, in rotation. The integration of the moral posture of teachers and ministers into every family's norm of conduct was thus unavoidable. Until well into the eighteenth century, in addition, Thursdays were days of worship in most towns in New England, along with Sundays--thus making all the more pervasive the influence of religious ritual and its values on community life.

The fact of the American Revolution changed these patterns and in ways that went well beyond the predominantly secular rhetoric of the founding documents--the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. The idea of freedom--<u>from</u> England, <u>from</u> the established religion, <u>to</u> seek one's own fortune, <u>to</u> build ones's own community--quickly degenerated into an atmosphere of license. The two generations which followed George Washington's dignified presidency saw increases of crude and individualistic behavior, epitomized by the frontiersman hero, General Andrew Jackson, who was ultimately elected president, ushering in a period when hostility to

traditional religion and polite society, and admiration for such frontier virtues as gambling, fighting, and living by one's wits were much in vogue.

The many social reform movements of the 1830's, 40's, and 50's had their origins in the horrified recognition by well-bred Americans that the new nation had devolved into an immoral and chaotic society. Temperance, anti-slavery, bank reform, efforts by churches to establish new colleges in the West (now Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois), prison reform, compulsory schooling, and other causes grew rapidly as efforts to cope with a seemingly lawless society. These were not grassroots social reforms, nor protests by the underclasses. Indeed, in the 1840's, large numbers of non-English speaking immigrants also began to arrive--primarily Irish and German. And precisely because these people did not participate in community life, often did not attend school, and went to Catholic churches, the predominantly Protestant Anglo-American majority and certainly the social and political elite suspected them of not upholding traditional American values. But ironically, it is this period of American history and the failure of existing social institutions to cope with the economic and demographic changes precipitated by political independence that, with hindsight, we must regard as the seedbed of American pluralism--a pluralism which we now regard as an <u>essential</u> American value in contrast to more totalitarian approaches elsewhere in the

world. Beginning in the 1840's, German Americans become the second largest ethnic group in America, a position still held today.

The changes I have been describing between the 1790's and the 1850's were occurring primarily in the northern United States. In the South, the rural character of eighteenth century American life persisted for much longer. One way of viewing the American Civil War is as the conflict--some say, inevitable conflict--between the industrializing, pluralistic North and the more homogeneous, rural South. In religious terms, Baptists and Methodists dominate the nineteenth century Southern population as they had during earlier periods, whereas in the North, the Calvinist majority of the seventeenth century gives way, first, to a shared plurality of Calvinists, Unitarians, evangelical Baptists and Methodists in the eighteenth century, and, in the nineteenth century, to very large numbers of Lutherans and Catholics, in addition.

It is interesting to study the reasons why young Americans volunteered for army service in the Civil War. With the exception of recent Irish immigrants--who resisted conscription into the Union army--most young Americans in 1861 were eager to volunteer, some to fight (or defend) slavery, some to preserve the Union (or defend the right of the Southern states to establish their own polity). Mostly, however, young men hoped to become soldiers in order to demonstrate their own good character, to indicate their

moral virtue, and to bear witness to their religious zeal. Not until after the Civil War does the folklore begin to appear in reminiscences that the War was a defense of family life, or of the idea of the Union or, in other ways, a deliberate effort to bolster endangered institutions.

Individual virtue, more than the institutional, dominates from the Revolution to the end of the Civil War in the thinking by Americans about ways to insure their civic values. After 1865, everything that is said on this subject sounds decidedly contemporary to us twentieth century Americans, and precisely because it is institutional in its formulation.

Is there a lesson to be drawn from this rapid and no-doubt-too-simple interpretation of American social history? I think so; and it is that at no time in the American past did any one institution have a monopoly for very long in shaping the civic values of youth. In addition, it appears that until mid-nineteenth century, the appeal of individual freedom remains so strong that it prevents much thoughtful reflection on the role of social institutions. Moreover, it seems that the very interaction of various social institutions has sometimes had unintended results.

If we can leave this historical review and jump forward 100 years, to today, when the influences of so many of the traditional

social institutions have become much more limited than they once were, we are all the more inclined to put great faith in our schools and colleges. And appropriately so. After all, in the United States today, one-third of the entire population is involved in schools or colleges as students, employees, or volunteer, elected school board members. Education is today the single most pervasive social institution. Moreover, fully 50% of America's high school graduates eventually become college graduates--a rate of higher education that is extraordinary in the world.

We might be tempted, therefore, to be encouraged by the fact that there is, in the United States today, a wave of interest in making the curriculum more explicit in its attention to civic values. This trend has been growing for about a decade. But regrettably this trend has, with few exceptions, proceeded from the assumption that the traditional scholarly disciplines are inadequate tools for examining questions of values. Virtually all the curricular innovations in this area during the past decade assume that <u>inter</u>disciplinarity is the key. The greatest amount of activity has been in professional schools, especially medical schools, where fully 3/4 of all 127 medical schools in the United States now have professional ethics or human values components established in the curriculum.

In undergraduate colleges, the professional ethics approach--applied to business, health, and other major fields of study--is also popular, but one of several popular ones. The most popular is the "problem-solving" approach--that is, to group several courses on a phenomenon that is generally recognized as a social policy problem and let the approaches of different disciplines interact. The "problems" of "nuclear war," "environmental pollution," "racism," the "European Holocaust," and "American involvement in Vietnam" are examples of topics that have been tried frequently as the centerpiece of curriculum units that are intended to inculcate worthy civic values.

The difficulty with most of these efforts is revealed by the fact that team-teaching by two or more faculty members, each trained in one discipline, is usually required to make them work. If a single faculty member cannot integrate the methods of several disciplines, a student who barely knows the rudiments of even one discipline can scarcely be expected to have much success. Not surprisingly, students in these programs frequently learn socially acceptable, if imprecise attitudes towards those major topics, but little in the way of rigorous understanding.

In high schools, the "problem" approach is also utilized, but so is a "thematic" approach--equally hostile to traditional intellectual disciplines and with little more apparent success than similar innovations at the college level.

What would be better than the current efforts in schools and colleges? Following the historical lesson of the interaction of social institutions, I think we need to focus on the college-level training of those who will become the teachers of civic education at pre-college levels. Specifically, I think we need to ask more presistently: what should the aspiring teacher of young people study in college if he or she is to be effective in providing a good civic education to his or her own students? The answer lies in a blend of topics and disciplines from the fields we call the humanities and the social sciences. It is a blend that probably does not correspond to the current graduation requirements of any single college or university or the certification requirements of any state board of education.

The heart of this hypothetical curriculum lies in five main components. The first component is a study of history, particularly the history of important ideas and of major legal and political institutions. The reason for anyone to study history is that the study of history shows us which areas of human activity have been pivotal in the past and thus sensitizes us to those areas of human activity that are likely to be pivotal in the future. The particular reason would-be teachers of civic education ought to study history is that they need to appreciate how difficult it is for contemporaries to detect what is enduring and fundamental in the mix of events as they occur.

The second component of the curriculum ought to be the study of social and political thought. By reading the works of major thinkers on aspects of civic values and institutions, students will come to understand their own tradition and how it has evolved. The works to be read for Americans would include the American founding fathers--Jefferson and Madison, for example--and their direct antecedents--Hobbes, Locke, Plato, and Aristotle--but should also include some frequently overlooked works that the prospective teacher's civic education ought to include--such as Weber on bureaucracy, Marx on revolution, and Kant on ethics.

The third component of the curriculum should be economics, but not because economics provides the most fundamental explanation of our political system (it doesn't). Rather, as teachers we have the obligation to defuse the tendency of adolescents to see virtually everything as part of a conspiracy theory of vested economic interests. Only when adolescents become more sophisticated and appreciate the limitations of a mechanistic, economic interpretation can genuine civic education be achieved. We need to be certain that civics teachers become sophisticated about these issues themselves while they are in college so that their students can pass through their infatuation with economic theory in high school, and also become more discerning when they are in college.

The fourth component of the curriculum should be the study of human motivation and organizational behavior. These subjects should not be taught as they are in graduate schools of business management or engineering, where they are treated as sciences. Rather, high school teachers and their students will probably understand human motivation best if they study it through great literature in which the protagonists are portrayed so vividly and with such complexity that their struggles with basic human questions become comprehensible even to adolescents.

Fifth, the curriculum should make an effort to place our national experience in an international context. Although transcending North American parochialism is an important educational goal, it is one that in recent years has proved to be extremely elusive. No curriculum for civic education that hopes to succeed should make an attempt to teach global interdependence or intercultural understanding by explicit means because most direct efforts produce only encounters with anecdotes, glib generalizations about entire cultures, and, in the end, the inculcation of relativistic attitudes, not systematic knowledge. The concept of Third World Studies, no more than of Pan-European studies, may be useful ideologically but it bears little meaning in intellectual terms as a means of describing the relations among cultures. To avoid the dangers while honoring the goal, the curriculum might include a well-defined discipline--such as

comparative literature, comparative history, or comparative government--in which two specific things are compared and contrasted. Anything more diffuse would at best produce a mere typology.

In general, the curriculum we need for the preparation of teachers of civic education is one that does not preach abstractions about civic responsibility in the hope that the values will somehow be conveyed, but rather one that converts laudable objectives into substantive activities. What is described here is not a set of courses. Colleges and universities should think first in terms of appropriate bodies of learning, and then see that the subjects necessary to civic education are organized into courses.

It is this approach that, I believe, will do a more effective job in influencing the civic values of youth than other institutions have in the American past. An historical approach to anything ought to teach us to appreciate the uniqueness of events, the linear character of change over time, even the idea of progress. An historical approach explicitly rejects the view that the civic values of youth can be described best as behavioral tendencies that remain fundamentally unchanged in any era or culture, or that people are pretty much the same everywhere and were the same in the past as they are in the present. Thus, the ultimate lesson of the history of the effects of social

institutions on the civic values of American youth is that differences of historical time and place are real and that these differences do matter.